

# United States Department of the Interior

## BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

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March 15, 2000

EMS TRANSMISSION 3-16-2000  
Instruction Memorandum No. NV-2000-035  
Expires: 9/30/2001

To: Field Managers, Nevada

From: State Director, Nevada

Subject: Nevada Strategy for Addressing Sagebrush Steppe/Sage Grouse Issues

The ecosystems of the Great Basin are facing significant threats. Millions of acres have changed from healthy, functioning ecosystems primarily consisting of native species to systems dominated by invasive weeds and exotic annual grasses. Native wildlife species have been impacted by these significant losses in habitat, as well as by degraded and/or fragmented habitat conditions. At particular risk are the sagebrush steppe habitats that predominated in the Great Basin and the wildlife species that are obligate to and/or associated with these habitats. Several of these wildlife species are exhibiting downward trends in population and distribution. Petitions requesting federal threatened or endangered listing of several of these species are likely. A petition to list the sage grouse range-wide is imminent. Our goal is to aggressively address the causative issues and develop and implement cooperative action plans designed to achieve healthy, functioning sagebrush ecosystems that provide for the needs of sage grouse and other obligate and associated wildlife species. Successful implementation of on-the-ground actions to meet this goal may preclude the need for a federal listing of the sage grouse as well as provide a strong basis for addressing any future petition for listing other sage brush obligate species.

In follow-up to the meeting of February 23 and 24, the following strategy has been developed and will be the framework for Nevada's approach in achieving the above objective.

Nevada Field Offices will develop implementation plans (Sagebrush Steppe Management Plans) in cooperation with other Field Offices and federal and state agencies, and will incorporate, to the extent possible, the principles of community based planning. These plans will include:

1. Site specific definition and quantification of resource objectives that will meet the overall goal of healthy, functioning sagebrush ecosystems that provide for the needs of sage grouse and other obligate wildlife species.
2. Assessment of habitat conditions and risks.
3. Summarization of actions taken to date within the sagebrush steppe ecosystems which meet the objectives.
4. Actions necessary to effect positive change to the sagebrush steppe ecosystem and improve habitat conditions for sage grouse and other obligate sagebrush species.
5. Monitoring plan and adaptive management strategy.
6. Establishment of time-lines and funding strategies for implementation.

As an integral part of regional and range-wide efforts, these Nevada plans will be coordinated at both levels. Guidance will be provided relative to their content and structure to insure the level of consistency required to consolidate into a unified regional product for submission to United States Fish and Wildlife Service for their use relative to the expected listing process for sage grouse.

Plans should build on existing efforts that share common or related objectives. Examples would be incorporation by reference, other plans, guidance, and or initiatives such as the WH&B strategy, Fire Management Plans, Great Basin Restoration Initiative, Rangeland Health Standards, Minerals Revegetation Guidelines, etc. Local planning efforts should be consistent with NEPA and current land use planning guidance. Where required, these plans will provide for the amendment of existing land use plans during their development. Implementation strategies should focus on existing processes such as the Allotment Evaluation/Multiple-use Decision process, implementation of guidelines, etc.

Plans should be completed and implementation initiated by March 2002. A conservation agreement to implement the plan should be included as an addendum to the plan and should include signatures of all parties responsible for implementation actions.

It should be understood that finalization of the plan is not a prerequisite to accomplishment. In other words, efforts toward the conservation and rehabilitation of sagebrush habitats should continue as the planning develops. Field Offices should use the best available science, including the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies "Guidelines for Management of Sage Grouse Populations and Habitats," relative to sagebrush habitats and sage grouse habitat needs in ongoing allotment

evaluations, grazing permit renewals, and other permitting activities. The occurrence of sage grouse and sagebrush habitats should be added to the prioritization criteria for scheduling allotment evaluations and re-evaluations.

Other related efforts will require the support of Field Office staff. These tasks include:

1. Completion of final sagebrush/sage grouse management guidelines to be completed by May 1, 2000 by an interdisciplinary team to be assigned by March 15, 2000.
2. Complete Field Office interdisciplinary review of the Nevada sage grouse threats assessment by March 31, 2000 and finalization by April 14, 2000.
3. Completion of a Communication Plan by May 1, 2000. Technical team to be assigned by March 15, 2000.
4. Field Office nominations for locally knowledgeable ecologist to assist in refinement of Nevada GAP data base for statewide assessment. Nominations due by March 15, 2000.
5. Field Offices should provide feedback outlining their plans for implementing this strategy by COB March 24, 2000. This feedback should address workload implications and recommended adjustments.

The task at hand is monumental and the success will be dependent upon your commitment and dedication to the process and in the strength of our relationships with our partners. The potential impacts of continuing trends within our Great Basin ecosystems to native wildlife resources, rural economies, and the people of Nevada are unacceptable.

Signed By:  
Jean Rivers-Council  
Associate State Director, Nevada

Authenticated By:  
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